

# MEETING BILL BRANDT (LONDON 1980)

by Rutherford

Between my first and second years as a photographic arts student in Toronto, I spent July 1980 in the UK, visiting London, the Scottish Highlands and the Orkney Islands.

While in London, I spent many evenings in the *Load Of Hay* in Chalk Farm, acquiring a taste for bitter and imagining what it was like to have a 'local'. One evening, another patron, made sociable by drink, attempted to strike up a conversation. He asked me what I 'did', to which I replied (a little prematurely) that I was a photographer. Obviously pleased to have found a basis for conversation, he immediately brightened and told me that his stepfather was a photographer. Assuming that this meant weddings or baby portraits, I mumbled something noncommittal and continued looking straight ahead in the hope that he would turn his attentions elsewhere. Then he added: "His name is Bill Brandt; ever heard of him?"

Now he had my attention. I replied that, yes, I certainly had heard of the master photographer Bill Brandt. "Would you like to meet him?"

A little warily, I said that, yes, I would certainly be interested in meeting Bill Brandt.

He wrote down a telephone number, and told me to ring it the next day.

Hardly able to believe my luck (and half-convinced that he had just been having me on), I reasoned that Brandt's would not be the first name that would occur to someone just trying to impress me (Snowdon's maybe, or David Bailey's...) But, as it cost nothing to find out, the next morning, I rang the number he had given me and explained to the woman who answered the telephone that I was a photography student from Canada, and that I had been given this number to arrange to meet Mr. Bill Brandt. She explained that her son had told them to expect my call, that Mr. Brandt would be very happy to meet with me, and then asked whether I had any photographs that I could bring, as Mr. Brandt enjoyed seeing the work of young photographers. She gave me an address in Kensington, and invited me to visit the following day.

Presenting myself at the appointed hour, I was ushered into the living room and introduced to Bill Brandt.

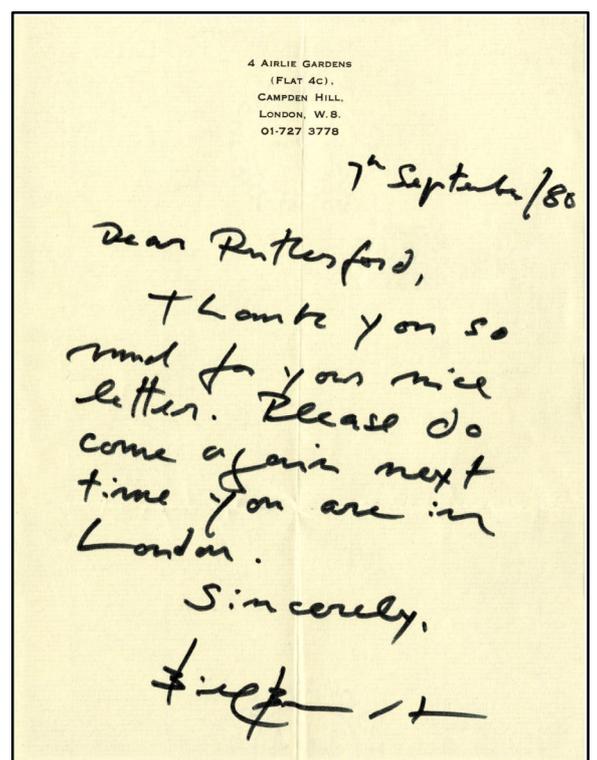
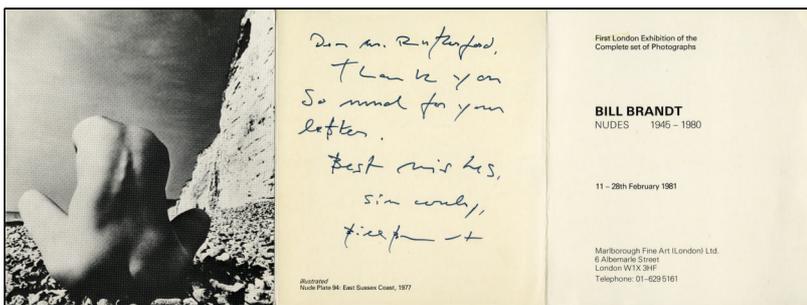
I was surprised to see not a single one of his famous photographs on the walls, but instead, a number of delicate collages made of egg shells, feathers, driftwood, and other materials gathered from the seaside.

At his invitation, I showed him the dozen black & white photographs I had brought with me to the UK in the hope of arranging a meeting at *Hipgnosis*. He was kind enough to say that he particularly liked two of my self-portraits: one in which I am looking in the lens through a square of two-by-fours, and another in which I am sitting in a barn, in a pile of hay, as a cloud of dust catches the light streaming in around me.

On my return to Toronto, I wrote to thank him for meeting with me. In reply, I received a very kind short note, and a signed invitation to an upcoming retrospective exhibition of his work.

It was to be his final exhibition. Bill Brandt died in 1983.

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